

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

RULES FOR SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

RULE 1 – A verb agrees with its subject in number.

Singular subjects take singular verbs:

The car stays in the garage.

The flower smells good.

There is an old saying: “Opposites attract.” The rule for singular and plural verbs is just the opposite of the rule for singular and plural nouns. Remember this when you match subjects and verbs. You might guess that stays and smells are plural verbs because they end in s. They aren’t. Both stays and smells are singular verbs.

RULE 2 – The number of the subject (singular or plural) is not changed by words that come between the subject and the verb.

One of the eggs is broken. Of the eggs is a prepositional phrase. The subject one and the verb is are both singular. Mentally omit the prepositional phrase to make the subject verb-agreement easier to make.

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT EXERCISE 1

Direction: Circle the correct verb in each of the sentences below. Check your answers on the following page.

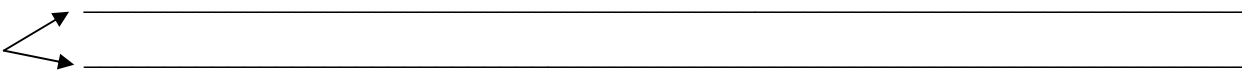
1. Your friend (talk-talks) too much.
2. The man with the roses (look-looks) like your brother.
3. The women in the pool (swim-swims) well.
4. Bill (drive-drives) a cab.
5. The football players (run-runs) five miles every day.
6. That red-haired lady in the fur hat (live-lives) across the street.
7. He (cook-cooks) dinner for his family.
8. The boys (walk-walks) to school every day.
9. The weather on the coast (appear-appears) to be good this weekend.
10. The center on the basketball team (bounce-bounces) the ball too high.

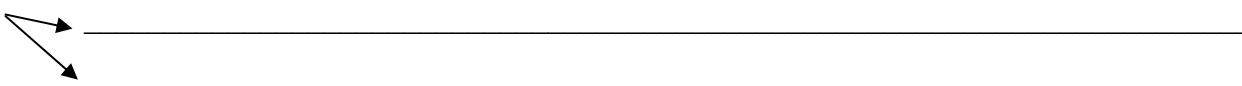
ANSWERS TO SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT EXERCISE I

1. talks
2. looks
3. swim
4. drives
5. run
6. lives
7. cooks
8. walk
9. appears
10. bounces

IT'S YOUR TURN

Directions: Write four sentences of your own illustrating the first two subject-verb agreement rules.

RULE 1 

RULE 2 

RULES FOR SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

RULE 3 – Some subjects always take a singular verb even though the meaning may seem plural.

These subjects always take singular verbs:

| | |
|----------|-----------|
| each | someone |
| either | anyone |
| neither | nobody |
| one | somebody |
| no one | anybody |
| everyone | everybody |

Someone in the game was (not were) hurt.
Neither of the men is (not are) working.

RULE 4 – The following words may be singular or plural, depending upon their use in a sentence, some, any, all, most.

Most of the news is good. (singular)

Most of the flowers were yellow. (plural)

All of the pizza was gone. (singular)

All of the children were late. (plural)

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT EXERCISE II

Directions: Circle the correct verb in the sentences below. Check your answers on the bottom of this page.

1. Each of the girls (look-looks) good on skis.
2. Everybody (was-were) asked to remain quiet.
3. Neither of the men (is-are) here yet.
4. (Is-Are) each of the girls ready to leave?
5. Several of the sheep (is-are) sick.
6. Some members of the faculty (is-are) present.
7. Nobody in the class (has-have) the answer.
8. Each of the girls (observe-observes) all the regulations.
9. All of the milk (is-are) gone.
10. Most of the seats (was-were) taken.

ANSWERS TO SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT EXERCISE II

1. looks
2. was
3. is
4. is
5. are
6. are
7. has
8. observes

9. is

10. were

IT'S YOUR TURN

Directions: Write four sentences of your own illustrating rules 3 and 4.

Rule 3 → _____
 Rule 3 → _____

Rule 4 → _____
 Rule 4 → _____

RULES FOR SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

RULE 5 – Subjects joined by and are plural. Subjects joined by or or Nor take a verb that agrees with the last subject.

Bob and George are leaving.

Neither Bob nor George is leaving.

Neither Bob nor his friends are leaving.

RULE 6 – There and here are never subjects. In sentences that begin with these words, the subject is usually found later on in the sentence.

There were five books on the shelf. (were, agrees with the subject book)

Here is the report you wanted. (Is agrees with subject report)

RULE 7 – Collective nouns may be singular or plural, depending on their use in the sentence.

A collective noun is a noun used to name a whole group. Following are some common examples:

| | | |
|-----------|-------|---------------|
| army | crowd | orchestra |
| audience | flock | public |
| class | group | swarm |
| club | herd | team |
| committee | jury | troop |
| | | United States |

The orchestra is playing a hit song. (Orchestra is considered as one unit—singular.)

The orchestra were asked to give their musical backgrounds. (Orchestra is considered as separate individuals—plural)

ANSWERS TO SUBJECT-VERB EXERCISE III

Directions: Circle the correct verb in each of the sentences below. Check your answers at the bottom of this page.

1. Margo and her parents (visit-visits) each other often.
2. Either the cups or the glasses (are-is) in the dishwasher.
3. Vern and Fred (need-needs) a ride to work.
4. There (is-are) a dog, a cat, and a bird in the garage.
5. Neither Matt nor his brothers (was-were) at the party.
6. Here into the main ring of the circus (come-comes) the trained elephants.
7. Either the workers or the boss (deliver-delivers) the merchandise.
8. The committee (work-works) hard for better schools.
9. There (is-are) many things to do before the holidays.
10. The jury (was-were) polled for their verdicts.
11. Here (is-are) the nails you need for the projects.
12. Either Joyce or Ellen (was-were) here.
13. The United States (is-are) a country of contrast.
14. A magazine and a book (was-were) lying on the floor.
15. The family (is-are) occupied with their individual problems.

ANSWERS TO SUBJECT-VERB EXERCISE III

1. visit
2. are
3. need
4. are
5. were
6. come

7. delivers

8. works

9. are

10. were

11. are

12. was

13. is

14. were

15. are

IT'S YOUR TURN

Direction: Write 6 sentences of your own illustrating rules 5, 6, and 7.

RULE 5 → _____
 → _____

RULE 6 → _____
 → _____

RULE 7 → _____
 → _____

RULES FOR SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

RULE 8 – Expressions of time, money, measurement, and weight are usually singular when the amount is considered one unit.

Five dollars is (not are) too much to ask.

Ten days is (not are) not nearly enough time.

On occasion, however these terms are used in the plural sense:

There were thirty minutes to countdown.

RULE 9 – Some nouns, while plural in form, are actually singular in meaning.

Mathematics is (not are) an easy subject for some people.

Physics is (not are) taught by Prof, Baldwin.

| | | | |
|------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|
| mumps | home economics | social studies | economics |
| measles | calisthenics | statistics | civics |
| physics | gymnastics | phonics | news |
| acrobatics | aesthetics | thesis | mathematics |

RULE 10 – Don't and Doesn't must agree with the subject. Use doesn't after he, she, it.

Doesn't he (not don't) know how to sail?

They don't (not doesn't) make movies like that anymore.

SUBJECT-VERB EXERCISE IV

Directions: Circle the correct verb in each of the sentences below.

1. Mumps (is-are) one of the most uncomfortable diseases.
2. One hundred dollars (is-are) not a lot of money to some people.
3. She (doesn't-don't) look very well today.
4. Twenty minutes (is-are) the amount of time it takes me to get home from work.
5. It (doesn't-don't) seem so cold today.
6. Gymnastics (is-are) easy for Angela.
7. Interesting news (is-are) what sells our paper.
8. A pound of cookies (cost-costs) about a dollar.
9. They (doesn't-don't) think they'll win the game tonight.
10. He (don't-doesn't) speak very well.

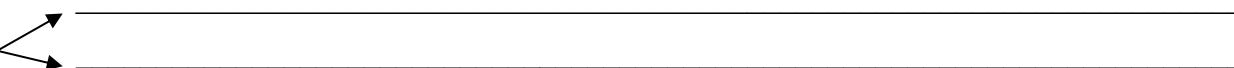
ANSWERS TO SUBJECT-VERB EXERCISE IV

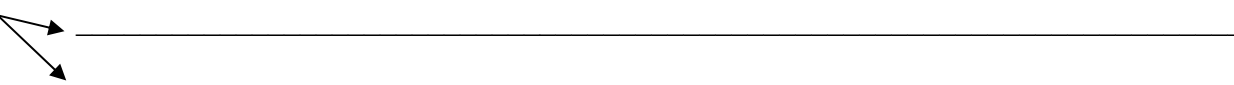
1. is
2. is
3. doesn't
4. is
5. doesn't
6. is

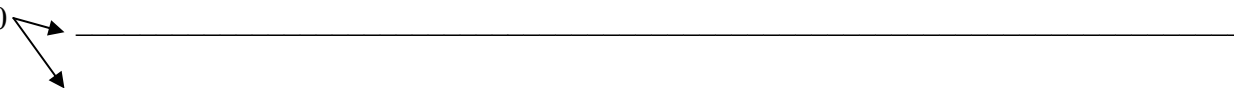
7. is
8. costs
9. don't
10. doesn't

IT'S YOUR TURN

Direction: Write six sentences of your own illustrating rules 8, 9, and 10.

RULE 8 

RULE 9 

RULE 10 

PROGRESS CHECK ON SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Directions: Write the correct verb in the blank to the left of each sentence. See the instructor for answers.

1. _____ Everybody (was-were) asked to be quiet.
2. _____ In a marathon, few of the starters (finishes-finish) the race.
3. _____ Sixty days (is-are) not enough time to complete the project.
4. _____ All of the workers (is-are) receiving their bonus.
5. _____ On our street (is-are) many tall trees.
6. _____ It (don't-doesn't) make any difference.
7. _____ The value of cars and motorcycles (has-have) increased.
8. _____ The principal and her husband (is-are) honored guests.
9. _____ Either the pitcher or the base runners (was-were) caught napping.
10. _____ One of my friends (believe-believes) in E.S.P.
11. _____ Have you ever heard the expression, "No new (is-are) good news?"

12. _____ There (was-were) several dents in the car.
13. _____ Louise (doesn't-don't) want to drive that long distance.
14. _____ Either Luis or Horace (pay-pays) the bills in our house.
15. _____ A boy and a girl (were-was) here to see you.
16. _____ The box of apples (is-are) on the porch.
17. _____ Some of the job applicants (is-are) expected to pass the difficult screening test.
18. _____ The army (is-are) conducting maneuvers in March.
19. _____ Here (come-comes) the family now.
20. _____ Neither of us (is-are) going to work.
21. _____ (Doesn't-Don't) they know when to quit?
22. _____ Thirty minutes (is-are) the time limit for the test.
23. _____ Measles (is-are) a disease most children experience.
24. _____ The class (is-are) turning in their registration forms today.
25. _____ Beyond the mountains (is-are) a fertile valley.